

United States.¹⁶ The drugs available through some *tiendas* include steroids; injectable vitamins; oral, injectable, and cream antibiotics; and even some controlled substances. A Burke county sheriff inspected one *tienda* and found more than 75 different pharmaceuticals for sale. Further, some of the medications on the shelf were out-of-date or manufactured for use in animals only. The availability of non-prescribed medications administered by non-licensed individuals raises serious concerns about the potential health risks associated with the use of these medications. Nationally the deaths of several children can be traced back to the use of self-prescribed medications obtained from unlicensed health care providers. In addition, non-sterile use of injectables has been suggested as a link to some HIV infections. The Food and Drug Protection Division of the NC Department of Agriculture, and the Dairy and Food Protection Branch of the Department of Environmental Health, have jurisdiction to monitor these *tiendas*, but to date, few enforcement actions have been taken.

Recommendations

The state should continue to support publicly funded programs that are already providing services to the Latino population, while at the same time help to expand the availability of services throughout the state. While many communities are underserved, efforts to expand services should target the communities that are most underserved. As a starting point, the state could look at the counties that have been identified as having the greatest need for primary care services.

Given the state's current fiscal crisis, the Task Force recommended that priority be placed on identifying federal or private funding to expand primary care services. However, the state and local communities also have a responsibility to help serve the growing Latino population.

Further, the Task Force members recognized that Latinos are likely to continue seeking medications from *tiendas*, until health care services become more accessible and affordable. While not condoning this practice, the Task Force members recommended that top priority should be placed on expanding the availability of affordable, linguistically, and culturally appropriate health care services provided by fully licensed health care professionals. Concurrent with this effort, the state should collaborate with Latino organizations to launch a public education effort to inform Latinos about the importance of first seeking medical advice from a trained health professional, how to navigate the US health care system, and potential risks of using self-prescribed medications. Similar information should be provided to the owners of the *tiendas*.

The Task Force recommended that:

2. **The NC Primary Health Care Association, in conjunction with the NC Office of Research, Demonstrations and Rural Health Development and other state agencies, encourage and assist communities in seeking federal Community and Migrant Health Center (C/MHC) funds to expand the availability of primary care, dental, and behavioral health services. Additionally, the NC General Assembly should appropriate funds to C/MHC to be used as support for federal grants.**